1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

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It has already been said (page 234) that a very high proportion of marriages are cross-cousin marriages, and that such unions formed 54 per cent. of the Hill Maria marriages into which I enquired. The proportion is not much less among the Bison-horn Marias. Such marriages are considered the most seemly, both because the family which has given a daughter to another family in marriage in one generation should have this obligation repaid by getting her daughter back as a wife for a son of the next generation, and because such family arrangements obviate the necessity of paying the much heavier bride-price required for getting a bride from a new and unrelated family. Such marriages are known as *gudapal* or 'tribe-milk' marriages. The commonest form is marriage between a daughter and her mother's brother's son (brother being again used in the extended sense). But it has also been extended to cover marriages between a girl and her father's sister's son and a son and his mother's brother's daughter, which merely mean the borrowing of a wife from the same family for two successive generations; in such cases the predominant consideration, apart from the wishes of the bridegroom and bride, is the smaller bride-price which will be demanded by relations so close in affinity. Moreover, it is a reflection on parents if, when a girl is mature, no marriage is arranged for her and no one asks for her; in such cases it is a recognized right of the parents to ask either the mother's brother's son or the father's sister's son to carry her off and make her his wife, even though he be already married to some other woman. Similarly a man, especially among the Bison-horn Marias, often acquires as second and third co-wives the younger sisters of his first wife. When a Bison-horn Maria girl marries a man other than her mother's brother's son, the latter, unless he has forfeited his prescriptive right to her by previously marrying another girl, is entitled to compensation from her husband, usually Rs. 5. But the Hill Marias do not observe this. For to them the free choice of the youth and girl is far more important, and when a girl is never compelled to marry against her will, it obviously is unnecessary to compensate anyone if she refuses to marry him. In a similar way Bison-horn Marias consider that a younger brother has a prescriptive right to an elder brother's widow, and he therefore gets Rs. 5 compensation if any other man marries her.

Cross-cousin marriage

595

No value is set on pre-marital chastity, and it is doubtful whether any girl preserves her virginity until her marriage. The typical attitude was thus expressed by Usendi Moda, the headman of Orcha, already mentioned as one of the men sentenced for the 1916 Orcha murder, and whose family pedigree is given in Appendix

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1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
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husband ill-treated her, while she provided a chorus of simulated wailing. They took her off to the booths prepared for her parents and the guests from her village, and sat there with her for the rest of the morning and all the afternoon, taking their food there, while the rest of the guests finished the *lauda* and slowly dispersed, beating their drums, along the forest paths. At about 5.30 p.m. the bridegroom entered the bridal hut alone, while his younger brother went to the booth where the bride had spent the afternoon, cried 'Come, sister-in-law, it is time that you were bedded,' caught her by the hand and tried to drag her off. She screamed and feigned resistance, but he called four or five other laughing youths to help him, and between them they pulled the girl to the door of the bridal hut, opened it and pushed her in, barring the door on the outside. Then they stole a cock from the bridegroom's coop, and, accompanied by the girls who had come with the bride from her village, plucked the cock and scattered its feathers along a path leading to a forest glade, where they cooked and ate it, and all dispersed.

The *otter* and *akemakatta* forms of marriage among the Hill Marias have already been mentioned; the same forms exist among the Bison-horn Marias. Actually women are very free to change their attachments or, if unattached, to go to the house of the man of their choice and live with him as his wife even if he is already married. It is convenient for the man to have the services of an extra woman in a society in which so much work is done by women; and it is not considered right for a nubile woman to be unattached. Particularly among the Bison-horn Marias, men with two or three wives are common; only one of these will be a regularly married wife, and the others will be either her younger sisters or parallel-cousins or other women who have come into the husband's keeping of their own choice, or after becoming pregnant as a result of a liaison with him. The expression commonly used by the Bison-horn Marias for a woman going in this way to live with a man is the local and Chhattisgarhi Hindi term *paisa-mundi*, and the unions are known as *paithu* or *odiyattur*; there seems to be no difference between these, just as for practical purposes there is little between the *otter* and *akemakatta* forms of the Hill Marias. Where an unmarried woman is made pregnant, and becomes the man's wife by living at his house, the man has to give his fellow-clansmen an entertainment (*paithu*) or dinner, and pay the usual bride-price. Husbands have similarly to give a dinner when unmarried girls, wives or widows, of their own choice and without their guardians' consent, go to live with him; but in such

Irregular marriages, widow marriages and divorce; attitude to abnormalities

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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833 partner; but here, so far from being thought improper, it is not unknown for a girl to attract a chicken-hearted chelik in this way.

Woman is indeed regarded as insatiable. 'Woman is earth; man cannot plough her.' The proverb means that as a single plough cannot break up the universal earth, so no man can really satisfy a woman. Here we have the opposite view to that commonly held in Europe, that sex is the man's privilege and the woman's duty; in aboriginal India, sex is the man's duty and the woman's right. It is her compensation for the embarrassments of menstruation and the pains of child-bearing. She has no more powerful means of dominating and subjugating the male.

It is difficult to say what a Muria regards as the normal frequency of intercourse. Among adults it is often said that a Muria woman insists on a daily connexion until the first child is born; after that twice a week is enough.' A wife is very passionate until she gets a child, but then the child takes her passion and her strength away.' Yet when a husband is more ardent it gives great satisfaction to his partner. 'If he goes to her three times during the night she beams with happiness and tells her friends, "I saw no sleep tonight. He gave it all to me. His life was in me all night".'

[595] This tradition imposes a great strain on the polygamous husband and may explain why multiple marriage is so rare. A former Chalki of Bayanar had two wives. 'We never quarrelled so long as I went daily to both. I didn't mind for I was strong enough. After all, it is only your land, and every man tills as much as he can. All you need is a pair of strong bullocks and a plough.'

833 A childless couple are often driven to excess in a vain attempt to stir the mysterious forces that cause conception. A Daroga of More Berma told me, 842 'My penis has been worn out by seven years' hard work, just as a bit of cloth is torn to bits after months of heavy wear, but still I cannot get a child'. And a man at Alor said, 'You may work night and day, but unless God fills the womb with hair, it is all of no avail'.

X 883 In the ghotul sexual practice varies. In places where there has recently been a pregnancy, the leaders insist on restraint as a contraceptive measure, 833 and sometimes demand that their permission be taken before indulgence. But this is emergency legislation, and the ghotul soon slips back into freer ways. In the stricter ghotul, the chelik and motiari do not have congress more than two or three times a week. At Esalnar, they claimed that they did not exceed once a week—for here they were much concerned to prevent conception.

But elsewhere I have heard the chelik laugh at such moderation. 'The penis is the *datun* (toilet-twig) of the vagina and should clean it every day.' In Binjhli, where chelik and motiari only sleep together once a week, on Fridays, they said that they had intercourse outside the ghotul every day, and at least three times on Fridays.

In most ghotul, the motiari expects her chelik to approach her sexually every day. 'If the boy does nothing, then the following evening when she is combing his hair she says, "Was it a day or a night yesterday? You forgot it was night. Why were you lying beside me like a corpse?" The boy feels very ashamed and says that he had a bad head or was very tired after working in the fields. "But I'll tire you out tonight", he says.'

'A night without intercourse', said a motiari at Chandabera, 'seems twelve years long.'

834 The Muria tradition, which is always wise and sane in sexual matters, interrupts the routine with many holidays. The regular monthly rest during the catamenial period of wife or motiari is a boon alike to husband and chelik. During pregnancy and after it there is a fairly long period of abstinence. During

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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THE GHOTUL AND MARRIAGE

Another form of compensation was recorded at Modenar. Here there were two Lamhada in the ghotul serving for two sisters; the Diwan was betrothed to the Dulosa, the Likhen to the Jaimo. One day the Jaimo was found to be pregnant by the Diwan; they went off together and were married, and the Dulosa was given to the Likhen in compensation. 883X 584

The institution is not very common; it would be wrong, however, to call it unpopular. Out of our 2,000 cases, 113 were serving-marriages. Of these 93 were cross-cousin marriages, 40 *gudawol* and 53 *kudiyāri*. 13 had divorced their wives or been deserted by them, a rather high proportion of 11·5 per cent as compared with the divorce-rate of the whole tribe which is under 3 per cent. But the other 100 marriages were stated to have been happy enough. The majority of Muria, however, can generally find sufficient money to pay the small bride-price required—and after all, a son in your house is worth something—and the Muria love their children. Hence only 5·5 per cent of marriages are of this type.

V. POLYGYNY

A gentleman, talking to Samuel Johnson about France, told him that in that country as soon as a man of fashion married, he took an opera girl as his mistress, declaring this to be the general custom. 'Pray sir,' said Johnson, 'How many opera girls may there be?' The gentleman answered, 'About four score'. 'Well then, sir,' replied Johnson, 'you see there can be no more than four score men of fashion who can do this.' Even if apocryphal, this rejoinder is relevant to any discussion of the prevalence of polygyny among primitive peoples. For this type of marriage is a simple matter of statistics. 585

Westermarck laboriously considers the geographical distribution of polygyny and then turns his attention to its prevalence in different grades of economic culture. Quite apart from the astonishing character of some of the witnesses whom he admits to his scientific court—for the aboriginals of central India he depends on Forsyth and Hislop (admirable in many respects, but how could they possibly have known the facts about Gond polygyny?), an article in the *Calcutta Review*, and the childish *Wild Tribes of India* by Rowney[1]—his entire argument is vitiated by one simple fact. In every primitive society, every woman must be married. There are no aboriginal spinsters. Widows may, and generally must, remarry. Widowers may remarry and usually do. There are no aboriginal concubines or prostitutes (outside certain professional tribes). Therefore the prevalence or otherwise of polygyny is conditioned largely by this one fact, the excess of the number of females over males. Thus Westermarck's statement that 'among pastoral peoples I have found none which can be regarded as strictly monogamous, and both among them and the higher agriculturalists polygyny is undoubtedly more frequent than among the hunters and incipient agriculturalists',[2] means nothing more, if it means anything at all, than that among hunters and incipient agriculturalists, there is a higher female mortality and no surplus women—which is what we would expect in view of the hard life lived at this stage of economic development.

In any society where there are more women than men, and where there are neither spinsters nor prostitutes, there must be some form of polygyny. This is so in Europe and in so-called 'higher' society everywhere, only there the plural wives are called mistresses and have no legal or other rights. The Muria is more honest and more just; he turns his mistress into a wife and accepts her children as his own.

[1] Westermarck, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 8. [2] Ibid, p. 20.

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THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

595 161 The Census of 1931 showed that 'women generally preponderate in the more primitive tracts and men in the more advanced areas'. The aboriginal tribes have 'a high proportion of women'.[1] This was certainly true among Gond, Bharia, Binjhwar and Kawar in the Central Provinces, but the returns for the Maria and the Uraon show a lower figure for women. Here I suspect the accuracy of the returns, for there has often been a tendency among aboriginals to return lower figures of women on account of the curious suspicion that the Census inquiries are leading to a wholesale deportation of girls to England for the pleasure of the sahibs or, as I was once told, 'for the honour of Queen Victoria'.

In 1941, the figures for the chief aboriginal communities in Bastar were as follows.

	Males	Females	Total
Maria	60,015	60,095	120,110
Muria	109,512	110,142	219,654
Bhattra	5,471	5,398	10,869
Dorla	7,097	7,508	14,605
Dhurwa (incl. Parja) ..	13,208	12,611	25,819
Gond	8,344	8,276	16,620

My suspicion about the accuracy of the low returns for Maria women in 1931 is confirmed by the fact that 10 years later women outnumbered the men. Women also outnumber men among the Muria, but it must be remembered that at least 50,000 of those returning themselves as Muria were in reality Bison-horn Maria. When we turn to the Ghotul and Jhoria Muria we find another picture.

		Muria males	Muria females
Narayanpur Tahsil—	North	8,390	7,975
	West	691	631
	South	8,647	7,833
Kondagaon Tahsil—	North	16,596	16,550
	South	17,049	16,506
	Total ..	51,373	49,495

There is thus a deficit among the Ghotul Muria of 1,878 women, out of a rough total of 100,000, or 18 per 1,000. There is little scope, therefore, for polygynous enterprise, even though I again suspect that there are actually more women in the tribe than the Census returns admit. Wherever, as Census Officer, I was able to check returns, I found a tendency to conceal the real number of motiari.

595 In the 2,000 marriages examined, only 44 were or had been polygamous. Of these 29 men claimed that they had lived happily with two wives at a time, but 9 admitted that their experiment had not lasted very long. In 5 cases the first wife left the husband, in 4 the first wife succeeded in driving out the

[1] *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. XII, Part I, p. 152.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

second after a time. In 6 other cases a plural marriage was in progress, but was unhappy and disturbed by constant quarrels. 595

Polygyny is not socially disapproved—though an incidence of only 2 per cent might suggest it was. The Muria's attitude is rather that a man has undertaken more than he is likely to be able to manage, and is more to be pitied for his difficulties than to be condemned for impropriety.

For example, at Berma, a Muria said, 'Two wives are like two drums with the player in between; he beats one or he beats both according to the rhythm required. But a good drummer does his best with a single drum'. Or again at Kanhargaon they said, 'You will always hear the noise of pots clashing and breaking in a house with two wives; nothing is done properly, not even rice is cooked in time'. And the Kandki of Bunagaon said, 'I am dried up even by one wife. How could I manage another?' But elsewhere I have heard it said that a clever man can keep two wives happy 'just as two hands beat the two ends of a drum in rhythm'.

It is everywhere said that the wives quarrel, not through sexual jealousy or about prestige, but because each thinks the other shirks her due share of work. As I show later in the chapter this question of the distribution of work is very important to the Muria mind and is indeed the cause of most of the quarrels and a high percentage of the suicides in Muria society. [578 762]

For example, in the following record of a quarrel it is the dispute about work that is really important. A husband has been neglecting his senior wife. 'Is my vagina bitter and hers so sweet?' she says and then turns on the junior. 'You *bīploti*, it is I who made this man what he is today: everything in the house is mine; all you should eat is my leavings.' The younger girl replies, 'I didn't come here of my own accord: he is as much my husband as yours, for it is he who brought us both here'. Then the husband says to the elder, 'Don't be angry. I have brought this girl, not because I love her more than you, but so that she can help you in your work'. 'But that is what she never does. When I am cooking, she should fetch wood, when I am defiled, she should cook. But she refuses.' The younger wife, in some villages, has to observe various vital taboos. She cannot approach the Pot of the Departed at will. She can only go at the New Eating Festivals after an offering has been made and a feast enjoyed. Before this she should not take any grain to the place where the Pot is kept. [784]

In the sexual sphere it is supposed to be comparatively easy to manage two or even three wives.[1] The headman of Chandabera, a charming man with the body of an athlete, told me how he arranged that he himself and each of his two wives slept in three different places. Then he made love to one or the other according to his desire, not much caring whether the other was awake and watching or no. On this point, he said, he never had trouble. In Badgaon, a Muria said that he had to have his senior wife three times a day and the junior twice in order to stop them fighting over his body—but this was doubtless an exaggeration.

I will quote some of the remarks made by these sexual athletes during the statistical inquiry.

A Sirdar of Kejang: 'I did not care for my first wife: I married her at my parents' wish, and they were more interested in marrying a rich man's daughter

[1] In many tribes, leading 'characters' take pride in keeping a number of wives. A Muria of the Oyami clan in Kanapur had six wives; in Kerlapal another Muria had seven. I found a Juang in Keonjhar State with seven. The famous Yogi Baiga of Mandla had six, with twenty-six children. A Pardhan of Balaghat had a similar number and used to take them all, walking behind him in a file, when he went to a bazaar.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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595 than in my happiness. Soon I found I could not bear to sleep with her and I went back to the ghotul. There I fell in love with Buski and eloped with her and married her. Afterwards I felt sorry for my first wife, and simply out of kindness tried to sleep with her. In this way I lost all happiness, for they began to quarrel with each other, and with me.'

A Saidar of Pharasgaon: 'I lent a man twenty rupees. When the time came for repayment he had nothing to give. So he told me to take his daughter instead. We all three live together very happily. I once beat my second wife for not working properly, but that was the only time we quarrelled.'

A Chalan of Kehalakot: 'I feel ready for a second wife now, but I don't want to be a dog.'

A Kamdar of Chandabera: 'We hear that two wives won't sleep together. But we Muria have always been together in the ghotul, and if a man has two wives, they are both content to sleep with him.'

A Pujari of Kachora: 'I was married to a much older girl and she was always abusing me for having such a small penis. I used to say, "Give it time to grow and all will be well". But she would take no notice and was always wandering about in search of something bigger. Later on I married three wives'—probably to restore the self-respect so deeply injured by his first wife.

A Saidar of Bargaon: 'I had no children from my first wife and she begged me to marry another girl. So I married a widow. We lived together very happily. I always slept with my first wife, and the second lay near by. I used to have intercourse with each of them on alternate days'.[1]

A Jolia of Malmeta: 'I have no children, and I want to marry a second wife. But I have no money to pay for one. I think about it day and night and feel very wretched.'

A Baidar of Bunagaon: 'I am a Siraha. One day some people brought me a girl for treatment. I could do nothing. So they said, "Take her as your second wife, and you will cure her". So I married her, and put on her finger a leaf-ring of aonra, and we have fought the gods together. By becoming my wife she has been cured.'

Surju of Kuntpadar: 'My first wife was barren, and she herself suggested that I should marry another. I did and slept with each alternately. Sometimes they quarrelled, but once the younger girl had a baby, they became great friends, and my elder wife is very fond of the child.'

Here we have many different reasons for polygyny—the desire for offspring, the repayment of a debt, the need to restore injured dignity, a love-affair. In one case the first wife urged her husband to take a second, but more often she employs all the resources of magic or intrigue to prevent her husband installing a junior partner. Chaitu of Chandabera described his experiences in this matter.

> A girl came one day to my village and I fell in love with her. I asked her to come to my house and she agreed. I immediately sent for liquor and invited the village elders to drink. At about midnight, while everyone was drinking outside, I suddenly felt that I must see

[1] The tradition that both wives are to be treated as sexual equals is rooted in Hindu antiquity, as is shown by the admonition of Daksha to Soma for loving Rohini to the exclusion of the other twenty-six constellations. 'Behave in the same way towards all thy wives that a great guilt may not come on thee.' But Soma took no heed and was cursed to wax and wane continually. The *Kamasutra* also says, 'If a man has gathered many wives, let him be the same to all.'—J. J. Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India* (London, 1930), Vol. II, p. 471.

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what she was really like, so I went to the house and asked her to lie with me. She asked me what I was doing outside and I said I was drinking in honour of her marriage to me. Although she had been very sweet to me up to that moment, she suddenly cried, 'No, you are simply drinking my urine'. I was drunk and got very angry, and though she tried to prevent me I forced her. But it gave me no pleasure. 595

Next morning I found the girl was ill. There was no fever or anything we could see, but she lay sick on the ground. I took her to a Siraha and we had to stay with him for a fortnight. I used to give her food and do everything for her, but she got no better. One day I tried to have her again, but she said, 'Wait a moment while I go outside' and she slipped out of the house and ran for her life to her own village. I am sure that my elder wife did some magic to turn this girl's heart away from me. Later I tried to marry another girl, my elder brother's widow, and my wife drove her away also.[1]

VI. Adultery

The Muria have the reputation of observing a very high standard of marital fidelity, and all my observations go to confirm popular report. The incidence of divorce, less than 3 per cent, suggests that they regard marriage as something to persevere in, and while obviously no statistics can be supplied for individual infidelities, social tradition and religious belief are directed towards making adultery both difficult and dangerous. 837

The Muria, usually so tolerant and gentle, are here exceptionally rigorist. Adultery brings the swift vengeance of heaven not only on the guilty individuals, but on the tribe. A woman's sin can ruin the ritual hunt and in consequence endanger the year's harvest. The vision of priest or medium can be dimmed by the infidelity of a wife, children may suffer and die, tigers may assail the village herds. The guilty pair themselves are visited with a shocking punishment; their bodies become covered with sores and swellings, and a watery dropsy brings a wretched death. 837 753

This is no empty danger, as is proved by actual examples. The Solia of Munjmeta told me how his grandfather died of this cause; in Sidhawand, when a man eloped with a married woman, his father died of dropsy and he himself became a permanent invalid. In Lihagaon, one Badru died after an act of adultery. This vengeance comes from the Departed who are the guardians of the purity of family and clan. In Kongera an outraged husband 'set the Departed on the guilty' and wife and lover fell very ill. At Netanar a Muria said that he was only able to preserve his wife's virtue by the help of the Departed whom he constantly invoked for this purpose.

Adultery is suspected when cattle die suddenly, especially if the tongue protrudes and there is a certain kind of watery discharge. The Siraha then 837 783

[1] In Indian tradition and folk-lore, the majority of heroes are successfully polygamous—Ramachandra being a notable exception. In the *Katha Sarit Sagara*, the first wife is represented as welcoming her new companions. Suryaprabha married seven wives on seven consecutive days: by his magic powers he was able to divide his body and live with them all at once.—N. M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story* (London, 1924-5), Vol. I, p. 429. Naravahanadatta had a similar power of self-multiplication (ibid., Vol. II, p. 477. See also Vol. I, p. 451). Folk-lore wives usually agree—unless they all combine against a youngest favourite. Among Gulsla Shah's happy co-wives, Panj Phul helps her husband to obtain his fourth.—J. H. Knowles, *Folk-Tales of Kashmir* (London, 1888), pp. 466 and 483 and compare M. Frere, *Old Deccan Days* (London, 1909), p. 324. There is an amusing note on the subject in W. McCulloch, *Bengali Household Tales* (London, 1912), pp. 318f.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

be distributed equally; no one boy must do more than another; no one may shirk, but no one may be unduly burdened.[1]

In the home, after marriage, quarrels usually arise about the distribution of work. This, rather than sexual jealousy, is the real cause of dispute in polygamous households. Where brothers live together, their wives quarrel about the serving of the food. To say *tokirsa* of a girl implies that 'she stares at other people eating' in a suggestive way; 'she peeps in from the door when other folk sit down for a meal, hoping to get some' but she will do no work herself. The real sting of the expression *jutaha*, 'eater of another's leavings', is that it suggests that the *jutaha* never works for himself, but goes cadging round ready to eat anything, even the scraps off dirty plates.

Men beat their wives for not cooking properly, but rarely for any other cause. Here again, the reason for a man's anger is not that he feels he has missed a good meal, but that he thinks his wife is not doing her fair share of work of the home. He himself has been out all day working in the fields; his wife has been enjoying herself at home, chatting with her gossips, wasting her time; otherwise she would certainly have cooked properly.

The actual records of these quarrels are instructive. At Jhakri I overheard a man quarrelling with his wife. 'Why didn't you make the rice soft, you *jutaha*?' he shouted. 'You haven't even yet learnt to cook. When you were a girl did you do nothing but dance at marriages?' To which his wife replied, 'Of course, all through my youth I sat still in the house, and my food was brought to me in bed. Ever since I married you, you have done all the work and I have just sat filling my belly. Come along, *mailotia*, turn me out of your house, you can get another cook, and I'll live somewhere else.'

At Palli, Shamrao Hivale was privileged to listen to a wife abusing her drunken husband for chronic idleness. It was an epic row, which went on and on, and of which every detail was so often repeated that it was easy to record.

> You can only live, screamed the woman, where there is a smell of liquor. That is your real home—the out-still—there is your bed and hearth; you have no home here. What will you do if I die? Who will feed you, who will look after the children? If you won't work, I will leave you and I will take away my children. You wander all day like a goat and all night like a thief. There is no salt in the house, there are no chillies; suppose the landlord comes and asks for some, or suppose a constable comes and wants food, what shall we do? If visitors come, what food can we give them? How are you going to pay the taxes? You shameless creature, a woman has sense but you have none. When there is work to be done, there is no life in you, but when you see liquor you are full of vigour. Then you are like a pig when it catches sight of excrement.
>
> You child of a Ghasnin's vagina, go and wash your dirty face and eyes; go and see how other people work. If I had known what you were like, I would never have come to your house, you corpse. When there is work to be done in the house, then your back begins to ache, your penis is sore. Look, your son is ill, but you won't go to the Siraha—

[1] The Santal also insist on the exact division of food at festivals—P. O. Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine* (Calcutta, 1925), p. 78—and I have noticed it also among the Orissa tribes. So keen are the Savara on the precise allocation of labour that when I have required porters to shift camp, every man in the village has turned up—many more than necessary—to ensure that no one does more, or less, work than anyone else.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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the fault of his wife and daughter, who had not tied the calf up properly in the evening. Hurra's wife was well known for her quick temper; she was continually quarrelling, especially if her husband ventured to interfere with household matters, and it is said that the daughter had learnt to take her mother's side. After the quarrel about the calf, the older woman set fire to their house and took her daughter away to the field-house out in their clearing. Here she first hanged her daughter and then herself.

Yet another wife from the same area, Galle, was obviously a bad housewife; she used to tell her husband that she would throw their child on the ground if he ordered her to do any work. On the day of her death she had been asked to prepare leaf-cups and food for the whole family—a large one. This seems to have been the immediate cause of disturbance, and she hanged herself. But there was undoubtedly a long and miserable tale of domestic unhappiness behind it.

In three remarkable cases it was the husband who committed suicide from remorse and sorrow. Barse Chewa asked his wife, a sick and miserable woman, to light the fire early in the morning. She was rather slow about it and Chewa beat and kicked her, knocking her unconscious. He was so ashamed and frightened that he killed himself. Sori Deva, angry at the loss of two of his cows, miserable because he had beaten his wife, did the same. So did Marvi Dhodsa who beat his wife, who was suffering from sore eyes, for not keeping the baby quiet. That night Dhodsa felt very miserable; he realized that his wife was ill, that he had no right to beat her, and that the child too had sore eyes and was bound to cry. He crept out of the house and hanged himself on a mahua tree with his own cloth.

III

THE POLYGAMOUS HOME

The strains and stresses of a polygamous household do not appear to result in tragedy so often as we might expect. Polygamy is not perhaps very common among the Maria, for the simple reason that there are not enough women to make it often possible. Those men who do keep more than one

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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595 wife at a time are generally the sort of people who would make a success of anything, even of so complicated a matrimonial adventure as this. The rough, dominating Goge, for example, was exactly the sort of person who would have had three wives.[1] Oyami Masa, who killed his younger wife at Khutepal, was again a strong, powerful, interesting character, a typical polygamist. And indeed provided the husband treats his wives with more or less equal consideration, and provided he is sufficiently potent to satisfy them all, there is a chance that such a domestic arrangement may succeed. But woe betide the 'good' husband, whose virtues are those that civilization may applaud, who enters on this experiment.

674 595 578 The failures that come to light are not many, but they are interesting. Sometimes the jealousies and quarrels lead to murder, sometimes to suicide. At Khutepal I visited the family of Oyami Masa, and met the charming old lady who was his senior wife. He was just out of jail after a year's imprisonment for killing his younger wife, Tokki. Tokki was a widow and by no means young, for her son by her previous husband had been old enough to go to the Tea Gardens of Assam. At the beginning of 1940, when Tokki had been living with Masa for about six months, the son returned from the Tea Gardens bringing three bits of cloth with him as a present for his mother. Masa, as one would expect, took possession of the cloth and this naturally upset Tokki very much. She declared that the older wife had persuaded him to keep the cloth simply in order to be vexatious. Masa replied that, since he was the head of the house and was feeding her and her son and everyone else, it did not matter whether he kept the cloth or she did. The quarrel—as such quarrels do—went on and on and at last during supper one evening Masa got so angry at the woman's nagging on the subject that he picked up a stick and beat her. It is not known how hard he beat her or whether he intended to kill her or not, since he had the body cremated immediately. For the woman died. No report was made to the police for three weeks by which time all the evidence had disappeared, and it was impossible for the court to do more than to sentence Masa to a year's imprisonment under

[1] See Case No 71.

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674 578 595 Section 323, I.P.C. for what he admitted, voluntarily causing hurt to his wife.

At Dugeli I met Bugori and his senior wife Jimme. Bugori, a most attractive young man, had been able to win the affection of two women both of whom appear to have loved him devotedly. Unfortunately Jimme's jealousy knew no bounds, and one day, when the two women were out together working in the jungle, Jimme, who was robust and powerful, tried to kill the younger girl with her axe. But she survived, and Jimme went to jail for three years. During [626] her absence the younger wife remained with Bugori. But when Jimme was due for release, the village held a panchayat and decided that the younger wife must go to live at her mother's house for fear that Jimme might try to kill her again. When Jimme came home, therefore, after Bugori had [783] given the usual feast to the villagers and had purified her of jail defilement, he took her to his house where she has lived very happily and borne him children. He visits his younger wife in her mother's village from time to time, but does not allow her to come to his house for fear of another tragedy.

Markami Handa had two wives, but does not seem to have been able to keep the affection of the younger, an attractive girl about twenty-four years old. She fell in love with another man and he killed the husband to prevent him taking revenge. Marvi Kesa had three wives, and ill-treated the youngest. One day, after he had beaten her, she ran away to her father's house. There was a quarrel there, and Kesa killed his father-in-law. Poyami Masa had two wives, and a Dhobi tried to seduce the elder. The younger discovered the intrigue, and probably thought it was an excellent opportunity to get rid of her rival. She told her husband, and he was so angry that he stabbed the older woman with an arrow and was himself sentenced to life imprisonment.

Tati Harma had three wives. At the time of the tragedy which brings his name into this record, only two were living. The younger wife had borne him four children, but Harma used to beat her constantly saying that she did not work properly and ate too much. So serious were the disputes in the home that a panchayat fined husband and wife four

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674 annas each for not living happily together. One morning
578 the elder wife went to fetch Harma from the field-hut where
595 he had been sleeping, and found him dead, killed by the younger woman who could not endure his ill-treatment longer.

The complications and petty miseries of a polygamous home are illustrated in the story of how Sori Dome murdered her elder co-wife, Chule. Even while their husband was alive, the two women were always quarrelling. Three years before his death Dome beat Chule over the head with a bit of a broken plough, and Chule took a whole month to recover from the blow. Dome used continually to threaten the older woman that one day she would kill her. After the husband's death, matters got even worse. Chule was old and feeble and suffered from yaws, which made her irritable and exacting. But the two women continued to live together, along with their husband's elder brother, in their husband's house. Just before the tragedy, Chule made peevish complaints that Dome had been extravagant in using up the rice, to which the other replied that, since she had eaten it, it was not wasted. One evening, after they had been working in the fields and quarrelling all the time, they set out to go home. Dome had an axe in her hand and her two children were with her. Chule was carrying a bamboo basket. Dome urged the old woman to hurry up, but she replied that her feet were hurting her and she would follow later. Exasperated, Dome pushed Chule by the back of her neck and then struck her a blow with the axe. The old woman fell down, and Dome hit her again and she seems to have died on the spot. Medical examination, however, showed that there was no fracture and no dislocation either in the head or ribs where the blows had fallen. Dome did not use the sharp edge of the axe, and it is possible that she did not intend to kill the woman, but only wanted to teach her a lesson. On the other hand, of course, it was greatly to her advantage that Chule should be eliminated.

578 It is perhaps rather surprising that there is not more
595 suicide in polygamous households. But it does, of course,
762 occur. Bandi, headman of Khutepal, had two wives. They quarrelled and the elder woman hanged herself. Masa of Samgiri also had two wives, and the younger girl quarrelled

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with him saying that he did not give her proper clothing or ornaments and that he did not sleep with her often enough. Jealous and frustrated, she hanged herself in a fit of despair. Poyami Gupe of Bastanar, a girl of about eighteen years, was widowed at sixteen and remarried two years later as the junior wife of Guddi. One day, about seven months after the new marriage, Gupe went to collect young bamboo shoots—a great delicacy to the aboriginal—and came home rather late in the evening. For this she was scolded by her co-wife and no doubt accused of every crime that jealousy could suggest. She left the house and went to stay with her maternal uncle. Guddi went to bring her back, but rather than go with him she hanged herself.

Kawasi Dulga's reaction was unusual. He appears to have been one of those husbands who should never have tried such an experiment; a man of weak character who could not keep his two wives in order. The women were always quarrelling and made his home and life a misery. One day he went with the younger to the bazaar and, as they were coming home, they quarrelled and Dulga slapped her. Presently he told her to go ahead as he wanted to relieve himself. She walked on a little way, but he did not appear and when she went back to look for him she found him hanging from a tree.

IV

The relationship between the wives of brothers is carefully regulated. Between an elder brother and his younger brother's wife there is an absolute taboo: there is no stronger rule of avoidance in all primitive society. But the younger brother stands in a special and privileged relationship to his elder brother's wife: he can flirt with her; he can make indecent jokes; he can become her lover; after her husband's death he has the first claim on her person and if she marries anyone else he has a right to compensation.[1]

It is obvious that among a people where brothers often live together, sharing house and lands, where jealousy is strong and sexual desire passionate and keen, such a tradition may

[1] For a detailed study, see Shamrao Hivale, 'The Dewar-Bhauji Relationship', *Man in India*, Vol. XXIII (1943), pp. 157-87.